



**TESTIMONY OF BEVAN K. BAKER
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BEFORE THE
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
CITY OF MILWAUKEE COMMON COUCIL**

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am very pleased to be here today to present testimony on one of the most important issues public health deals with, the very serious health risk posed by the widespread and completely preventable exposure of our children and other members of the public to secondhand tobacco smoke.

I appear here today as Health Commissioner of a Department that since 1867 has existed for one simple yet powerful mission to safeguard the health of every citizen of Milwaukee. On behalf of the 15 previous health commissioners, and all of the men and women who have devoted their professional lives to the conquest of disease, please understand that tobacco is the single most important and most controllable threat to health of our city.

Please know that I could use every minute of my allotted time to outline the harmful effects of the secondhand smoke. I could discuss why this is dangerous or how it harms the human body. But, I will not do that. Because, there can be no debate that there is absolutely nothing good that comes from smoking or inhaling the smoke of others. The scientific evidence on the health risks associated with exposure to secondhand smoke is clear and compels immediate action by the Common Council. This is the moment of truth for Milwaukee.

So instead, I will briefly focus why I support a smokefree workplace. First, Milwaukee was once the healthiest city. It gained this distinction because it put the health of its citizens first. City leaders understood that many things are important, but probably only a few are absolutely critical. Today, I ask what can be more critical than protecting the public's health? Specifically, I know of no reason for people who are employed by restaurants, bars and taverns, as well as customers to suffer the ill effects of secondhand smoke when all others are able to breathe clean air.

Second, opponents of the proposed ordinance state that establishing a smokefree workplace will hurt Milwaukee. Well, I submit to you that there is something much more dangerous hurting our City. It is fear. Fear of change. These opponents are the champions of confusion and they offer no credible data to support their claims. Please understand that if Milwaukee is to compete in the global marketplace we must recognize that hospitality starts at home with our own citizens.

We have missed the chance to be the first City to safeguard our citizens from secondhand smoke. Let's not be the last to change. Further, how can we even begin to change this city's health disparities which rank among the worst in the United States if we refuse to embrace the most powerful weapon we have...prevention? To all the opponents of this ordinance please know that what you do for you alone dies with you. What you do for others and the world remains and is immortal. There is no higher calling than to protect a fellow citizen.

Simply put, indoor workplaces must be smoke free to be safe. This is as important for public health as the adoption of food safety standards decades ago. As leaders, you have a duty—not a choice—to protect the public's health. There is a major dividend to be collected for all of Milwaukee if you choose to protect those who are among the most vulnerable in our city – by putting them first – we protect everyone.

I understand that there is consensus among us around the need to effectively discourage children from developing the smoking habit. Surely, if we can agree that children and teenagers should not smoke, we can also agree that they should not be exposed to secondhand smoke.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I remain hopeful that this wonderful city we call home will be a once again be a great and progressive city that puts the health and well being of its citizens and visitors first. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.